

SLAVS AND TATARS

FRIENDSHIP OF NATIONS: POLISH SHITE SHOWBIZ

10.12.2011 - 22.01.2012

LONNIE VAN BRUMMELEN & SIEBREN DE HAAN

SUBI DURA A RUDIBUS

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ENGLISH

Slavs and Tatars

Artist collective Slavs and Tatars reveals the often neglected cultural common ground between Slavs, Caucasians and East-Asians, and humorously but polemically scotches univocal Western interpretations. The show visualizes alternative spheres of influence between these cultures through a balanced collection of works brought together under the label *Friendship of Nations: Polish Shi'ite Showbiz*, and is in part a further elaboration of the project of the same name that was presented at the *Sharjah Biennial 10* earlier this year. The title refers to – and is simultaneously an attempt to subvert – the patronizing Soviet-Russian notion of “дружба народов”, literally the “fraternity of peoples”, or “friendship of nations”.

Presenting works in different media, *Friendship of Nations: Polish Shi'ite Showbiz* uncovers Iran and Poland's shared history. Against the background of two crucial geopolitical shifts – the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and the fall of communism in 1989, heralded by the Polish Solidarność movement – the revolutionary potential of handcraft and folklore is activated and explored as a source of mystical protest. This subject was first explored in *79.89.09*, a project initiated in 2009 that consisted of a series of lectures, a contribution to Berlin-based magazine *032c*, a newspaper edition that is being reprinted for the KIOSK show, and the mirror mosaic *Resist Resisting God* (2010).

The dome room is taken in by a series of colourful, handcrafted banners boasting reinterpreted, creolized slogans stemming from Persian and Polish culture. Arrayed to confront the visitor head-on, these banners seem to univocally propagate their message. What emerges is a mosaic and associative interplay of elements from both high and low culture, and an intertwining of politics and tradition. The exhibition surpasses the typical theoretical discussion on language and identity by referring to notable sidetracks of history, pointed one-liners and a liberal manipulation of patterns, power structures and language. Slavs and Tatars' creation and combination of disparate mental spaces and rituals is inviting and encourages dialogue. The mirror mosaic creates a kaleidoscopic space for reflection. While *Dear 1979, Meet 1989* (2011), with the accompanying newspaper *79.89.09*, presents a place of rest for the visitor, and reveals the underlying context of what is on display here. The mobiles or pajaks refer to the pagan Polish tradition that celebrates the yearly harvest with similar votive decorations. The upside-down tree shapes, much like the banners, are 'creolized' with Iranian and Polish designs and materials.

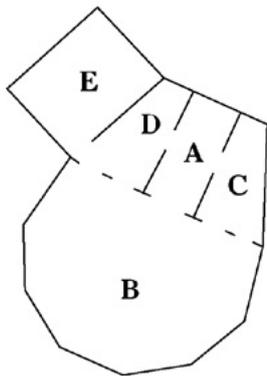
Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan

The adjacent room has been turned into a projection room for the film diptych *Subi dura a rudibus* (16mm film, 26', 2010) by the Dutch duo Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan. This silent film's inspiration and source material is a sixteenth-century series of tapestries depicting the 1535 conquest of Tunis by emperor Charles V. The tapestries were designed by Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen, a painter at the Habsburg court who was appointed an 'embedded' artist to accompany Charles' troops and make drawings to report on the campaign. The result is generally considered the first example of a work of art of a documentary nature in which the artist depicts himself as part of the scene. As the back of the tapestry is in fact the front for the weaver, Vermeyen made his design drawings mirrorwise.

In this film diptych, images of the tapestries and of the 'mirrored' drawings are synchronously projected alongside each other. The resulting choreography of mirror images recalls the well-known abstract ink blotches of the psychological Rorschach test, making the role of the visitor's own interpretation very

tangible indeed. The viewer's attention is focused on the discrepancies between the original drawings and the weaver's translation in the finished tapestries. The tapestry report shows multiple perspectives, presenting both the emperor's point of view and that of his opponents, and the painter himself is also depicted as part of the battle scene. As such, the diptych delineates a field of tension between what is to be considered interpretation, and what objective reality or truth.

The title of the film, *Subi dura a rudibus* is a palindrome that can be translated as "endure rough treatment from uncultured brutes". Just like its title, the installation itself can also be read in two directions: who is the brute and who is on the 'good side'? Van Brummelen and de Haan thus raise the question whether the painter in fact realized that, as an 'embedded journalist', he was incapable of representing an entirely objective perspective. In this light, the status of the tapestry, as a propaganda tool of its day, can be examined by comparing the sixteenth-century painter with a twenty-first-century war photographer, anthropologist or historian, who faces the same questions of representation. It is precisely part of the artists' intention that such visual inversions and conceptual reasoning only gear more questions. In the aesthetic space of this work, they wish to introduce a larger area of research that is situated between politics, history and culture. This particular showing of the work at KIOSK places it in an apt geographical context: Charles V was born here in Ghent, and grew up in Malines, also the city where the tapestries were made.



Exhibited works
(clockwise)

SLAVS AND TATARS
Friendship of Nations:
Polish Shi'ite Showbiz

ROOM A (entrance)

Wheat Mollah
Wheat, cotton, brick, glass case with
brass and wood
2011

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ROOM B (hemicycle)

Friendship of Nations
installation with 10 banners
2011

Pajak Nr. 9
Artificial christmas tree with
fluorescent light
2011

Resist Resisting God
Mirror mosaic, wood, plaster
2010

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ROOM C

Dear 1979, Meet 1989
Wood, kilim carpets, newspaper print
79.89.09, published by Book Works
2011

Pajak Nr. 6
Worsted, gold yarn, gold plastic
beads, metal
2011

Pajak Nr. 7
Wooden prayer beads, yarn, hand
blown mirror glass christmas balls,
metal
2011

Pajak Nr. 8
Yarn, satin tape, perforated tape,

velvet ribbon, black glass christmas
balls, metal
2011

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ROOM D

*Only Solidarity and Patience will
secure our victory*
Billboard (digital print on wall)
2011

Derwish Edition (a Mulberry)
Silk-screen print on cardboard and
paper
2009

Courtesy Slavs and Tatars: the artists,
Kraupa-Tuskany, Berlin.

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ROOM E

**LONNIE VAN BRUMMELEN &
SIEBREN DE HAAN**
Subi dura a rudibus

16 mm diptique, synchronous back
and forth projection, 26'
2010

Courtesy Lonnie van Brummelen &
Siebren de Haan: the artists, Motive
Gallery, Amsterdam.